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The Indonesia Human Rights Campaign

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Report of solidarity groups meeting, New York, 8 August 1991

Present: Jose Luis Gutteres (Fretilin); Jeffrey Rudolph (East Timor Alert Network, Canada); Merrill Findlay (East Timor Talks Committee, Australia); Doug McGregor (Hobart East Timor Committee); Kan Akatani (Free East Timor Japan Coalition and International Federation of East Timor/IFET); Carmel Budiardjo (TAPOL); Pedro Pinto Leite (International Platform of Jurists for East Timor and Dutch Indonesian Committee); Michel Robert (Solidarity Association for East Timor/ASIO France and Movement against Racism and for Friendship among People/MRAP); Bruno Kahn (Agir Pour Timor, France); Arnold Kohen (East Timor Project, Washington); Rt Rev. Paul Moore (retired Bishop of New York); Sister Mary Beth Reissen (Pax Christi and National Catholic Recorder).

The meeting was held after the UN Decolonisation Committee finished hearing petitions and government statements on the question of East Timor. Because the hearings continued until lunchtime on 8 August, the meeting lasted for only four hours, from 2 – 6 pm; some people present had to leave early.

IFET

Kan Akatani reported briefly on the establishment of the International Federation for East Timor which has now obtained associate status with the UN Department of Public Information. Retired Japanese ambassador, Professor Ohtori Kurino, has agreed to chair IFET. Associate status allows IFET to have access to UN documents. Copies of a UN summary of the Western Sahara question and a UN brochure containing all the Gulf crisis resolutions were circulated. The DPI has so far not agreed to publish the UN resolutions on East Timor.

Some UN documents do not comply with the UN's official position. The UN Yearbook for instance treats East Timor within the section on Indonesia. This should be taken up with the UN.

Communications

There was a discussion on the extent to which IFET would become the centre-point for circulating documents about East Timor. Akatani who lives in New York state could only handle circulation of UN material. It was agreed to seek clarification from IFET on the extent to which it could act as a centre for distributing information while maintaining present means of

distributing information through East Timor News, TAPOL Bulletin, etc.

There was a discussion on communications problems. It was agreed that an up-to-date address list of all groups worldwide was necessary and it was suggested that IFET should prepare this. There was a brief discussion of the E-mail East Timor conference but many present were not able to cope with the specifics of accessing and contributing to the conference, for lack of technical skills and modems.

It was agreed that the communications question should be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of solidarity groups in Rome (date not yet fixed). Since Japan always attends these meetings and Canada is likely to be at the Rome meeting for the first time, it was suggested that other non-European groups should also attend to make this an international gathering.

Lobbying at UN/New York

Following a discussion in London between Jose Luis Gutteres, Fretilin and TAPOL, it was suggested that solidarity groups which visit New York for the Decolonisation Committee should use the opportunity to lobby country missions as well. Carmel and Pedro did some lobbying this time and met the Vanuatu ambassador as well as mission heads or representatives of the Solomon Islands, the Maldives, Tanzania and PNG. It was agreed that this should become part of our activities in future.

This would be a good chance to inform missions about eg. Japanese MPs' attempts to visit E Timor, the attitude of the Japanese Govt, developments like the PET mission to the UN, etc. While Asian, African and Pacific countries are heavily tied to supporting Indonesia (and certainly need to be lobbied), Latin American and Carribean countries have fewer ties and might be more open to lobbying. The need for lobbying is all the more pressing now that Fretilin does not have a permanent representative in New York.

But although missions seemed willing to receive us, difficulties had arisen because we had tried to make appointments at such short notice. It was felt we should have a New York 'base' in future, a kind of office or reference point for receiving messages about possible appointments. Also, letters should be sent to missions a month or so in advance, requesting an appointment with the head of mission or the person in charge of work with the 4th Committee. It would also be best to divide out lobbying targets, all of which will need greater coordination between those going to New York in future.

Press work

A decision to issue a press release on behalf of the solidarity organisations present in New York foundered because of the unavailability of facilities and unfamiliarity with the workings of the UN press office. If in future, one of the activists going to New York can get a press card, this would make it possible to use the press room facilities.

We also discovered that if some of us with credentials from NGOs with UN consultative status go to New York, we would be able to use NGO facilities at the Secretariat. (IFET's DPI association does not allow this.)

US Senate resolution and Japan's ODA criteria

Bishop Moore reported that a group of cross-party Senators supported a move by Senator Claiborne Pell, Dem, chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, to introduce an amendment on East Timor into the Foreign Appropriations Bill. The amendment was cleared through the Senate and will be considered in 'Conference' when the two Houses finalise the text of the Bill. This amendment is not binding on the President but it is a strong recommendation and puts pressure on the State Department. It was agreed that PET should circulate the amendment, as a model for other MPs to pursue.

Akatani said that new criteria for Japan's ODA will be used by the East Timor Diet Forum to press for East Timor to be part of Japan's consideration in continuing its huge funding for Indonesia.

Australia's talks campaign

Now that so many conflicts are being resolved through talks (Cambodia, Cyprus, etc), the time for talks on East Timor had come and should be the focus of a global campaign. Xanana's call for talks without pre-conditions under UN auspices is the impetus for the talks. He repeated the call in his message to the UN submitted to the Decolonisation Committee.

Merrill explained the campaign and circulated copies of the brochure published by ACFOA to launch it. The strategy is to make East Timor into an issue at all levels of society that cannot be ignored. The aim would be to have everyone working on the same agenda, as broadly based politically as possible. It was felt that to achieve greater success, some management skills would have to be learnt.

The launch is planned for late September 1991. The campaign organisors have planned three Platforms.

Platform 1: The launch in September.

Platform 2: To make submissions to the Australian Senate Foreign Affairs Sub-Commission hearings on relations with Indonesia which start in October 1991.

Platform 3: 7 December anniversary. The aim will be to organise many activities - photo exhibition, drama performances, cultural events. One focus would be on Bishop Belo's decision to speak out.

It was suggested that a fourth Platform should be included (date unknown) to respond to events that may occur when the Portuguese MPs mission visits East Timor.

For the UK, Carmel said a meeting was planned for late August to brain-storm about a talks campaign in the UK. Peace groups, church groups and SEAsian solidarity groups would be invited, but it would be difficult to mount a campaign on the scale being envisaged in Australia.

Sister Mary Beth said the East Timor issue should be taken up at the SANE Freeze conference

planned in the US for November. An arms freeze for Indonesia should be demanded.

In France, Michel explained that MRAP and ASIO worked at a high level, through Joinet and Mrs Mitterand to influence government policy. MRAP has convened meeting of all human rights NGOs in preparation for the UN human rights commission and sub-commission and East Timor was raised.

International Jurists Platform for Support of East Timor's Right to Self-Determination

Pedro spoke on behalf of the Platform (still at the preparatory stage) at the UN. The idea of the Paltform was first discussed at the Oporto Seminar in May 1990. Some sixty jurists have now joined and a conference is planned for November 1991 in Lisbon with 100 jurists present, 40 from Portugal and 60 from other countries at which the Platform will be established. Funding will come from Portugal (government and private) to cover fares and accommodation. One issue to be discussed will be to see how the Western Sahara experience can be applied to East Timor.

Appendix

List of petitioners to the UN Decolonisation Committeee, August 1991

Fretilin, Jose Luis Gutteres
UDT, Joao Carrascalao
X Amnesty International, Geoffrey Robinson
Asia Watch
Carlos Candal MP (Socialist Party) Portugal
Antonio de Sousa Lara MP (Social Democratic Party) Portugal
Jose Manuel Mendes MP, Communist Party, Portugal
Diet Members Forum on East Timor (presented by Akatani)
Beryl Gaffney MP, Liberal Party Critic on Human Rights, Canada
X Merrill Findlay, East Timor Talks Committee, Australia
Doug McGregor, Hobart East Timor Committee
Jeffrey Rudolph, East Timor Alert Network, Canada
Bruno Kahn, Agir pour Timor
Michel Robert, ASIO and MRAP
X Kan Akatani, Free East Timor Japan Coalition
Pedro Pinto Leite, International Platform of Jurists
Pedro Linto Leite, Dutch Indonesian Committee, E Timor Working Group and X min Y.
X Carmel Budiardjo, TAPOL

Missions

Dr Rui Quartin-Santos, Portugal
Jose Luis Jesus, Cape Verde (for Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe and Cape Verde)
Abdul Nasier, Indonesia